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22 December 1954

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: Chinese Communist Intentions with Respect to the
Offshore Islands

1. The pattern of Chinese Communist military activity since the publication of SMIS 100-4-54, "The Situation with Respect to Certain Islands Off the Coast of Mainland China," 4 September 1954, indicates that the Communists may be pursuing a military course of action against the offshore islands not fully anticipated in existing National Estimates.

2. Actions in this period, particularly against the Ta Ch'eng, indicate that the Communists may be attempting through air operations to make continued naval support from Taiwan so costly as to be unacceptable to the Nationalists, and, in time and without having had to undertake amphibious actions, result in forcing the evacuation of certain of the island garrisons. Paragraph 7 of the Board Draft of SMIS 100-4-54 (30 August) discussed this question as a Communist capability, stating that Chinese Communist air power is sufficient if fully committed (a) to make continued Nationalist naval support of the islands unacceptable, and (b) "by full exploitation of their air superiority the Communists might be capable of making the islands untenable without direct amphibious assaults." During the coordination process and on the advice of the military representatives, however, the latter point was deleted, and unacceptable was changed to costly. In any event, in neither the Board Draft nor the final text was this Communist capability singled out as a specific and likely course of action.

3. The withholding of amphibious assaults against the offshore islands, at least until US intentions have been fully explored, and concentrating on efforts to gain air and naval superiority in the area would appear to be a logical, continuing Communist course of action. Such efforts would enable the Communists to gain experience and training in naval and air operations, to reduce by attrition the air and naval strength of the Nationalists, and possibly to secure Nationalist evacuation of the offshore islands without incurring the unknown risks and certain relatively heavy costs of direct assault.

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4. I do not wish to question the conclusion of MEM 10-7-54, "Communist Courses of Action in Asia through 1957," 23 November 1954, that the Chinese Communists "will probably attempt to seize some of the major offshore islands." However, in light of the considerations discussed above, it seems advisable that greater attention be paid on both intelligence and policy levels to the possibility that the Communists may defer direct assaults against the offshore islands in favor of air and naval operations designed to isolate the garrisons.

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National Estimates

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